

Speech of the European Parliament President Roberta Metsola for the Extraordinary European Council 24 February 2022 20:00 Brussels

Dear President of the European Council,
Dear President of the European Commission,
Dear Presidents and Prime Ministers,
Dear friends,

The scenes in Ukraine are difficult to witness - while we hoped and worked to promote a process of de-escalation, our fears and warnings were tragically realised this morning. President Putin has unleashed war in Europe.

This is outrageous. Cities, regions, Capitals of independent nations are not there for the taking. This is from the world of the painful past. It must never return.

The European Parliament's political leaders were clear this morning and we will hold an extraordinary plenary session on Tuesday on the situation. We are together in our condemnation and our solidarity.

The Russian invasion into Ukraine is part of President Putin's destabilisation agenda. It is a path that will bring the Kremlin in direct confrontation with Europe and the rule-based world-order. It is a path that pits authoritarianism against democracy. It is a path that we cannot allow him to walk unchallenged.

Ukraine is a country that embraced democracy and freedom - that believed it could forge a path for itself. Looking around the table, I can see the leaders of Member States whose populations believed the same. We cannot leave Ukraine alone. For their sake and for ours. We must show real solidarity with the people of Ukraine who awoke to their worst nightmare today.

We must also show solidarity with people fleeing and with Ukraine's immediate EU neighbours as they face security and humanitarian challenges. I know many of you have already launched proactive measures - and you can count on the European Parliament for support.

The European Union has proved itself united and resolute. We spoke with one voice when it mattered the most. This must be the message that emerges from here tonight: that we will act in unison, that we have the political will and strategic capability to face this threat. That we stand with Ukraine.

We recognise Ukraine's European perspective. We already have an association agreement and a free trade agreement, and very close cooperation with Ukraine in many areas, including on energy security. This is a conversation that we must keep having with our Ukrainian friends.

Europe stands for a way of life that embraces freedom and democracy. This is our strength.

We must not allow our resolve to be watered down by an aggressive Russia that pushes forward a value set that is very different to ours. That looks back at spheres of influence instead of forward to circles of cooperation.

If we are tempted to accommodate, to take a step back - we will be soon face another ultimatum. And what then?

Today, we face a threat not of our making, that we did not provoke - that we did not invite. Confronted with this aggression we have proved that the right thing to do is also the sensible thing to do.

- It is right and it is sensible to show practical solidarity with Ukraine as we did with the € 1.2 billion assistance - as we have done with our statements and our actions. The people of Ukraine must know we are with them.
- It is right and sensible to show our citizens in the Baltics and neighbouring States that our values matter. That we are prepared to pay a price for them if necessary. We must reaffirm this knowing the eyes of people in Moldova, Belarus and Georgia are on us.
- It is right and sensible to have halted the Nordstream 2 project - perhaps to even go further.
- And it is right and sensible to adopt massive, unprecedented, severe sanctions on Russia. We need more and they must be further-reaching including the exclusion of Russia from the SWIFT system, individual sanctions with no one off the table. Then we need the same commitment to develop a true European security and defence union

Let me shortly raise two issues that we cannot ignore.

We all understand that the threat goes beyond the immediate and that there are real implications for our energy security. We cannot ignore that we have

Member States that are totally reliant on Russian gas. We need to diversify our energy solutions and invest massively in Europe and in renewables.

Sowing doubt, instability and fear accompany the Kremlin's conventional warfare apparatus. This war is also being waged online. The Putin-backed narrative - a coordinated disinformation campaign - is spreading. We need to do more to counter the toxic re-writing of history. Let me assure you the European Parliament and its Members are committed to pushing forward the message of Europe

Finally, let me say that the Kremlin has long thought it could buy its way into Europe. It is time to close any loopholes, end the dangerous phenomenon of golden passports that provide a backdoor to European citizenship and ensure that Russian money does not become as critical as Russian gas.

At the end of the day, this is how we achieve our strategic autonomy.

Thank you.